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BRUNELLESCHI



BRUNELLESCHI

A POEM

BY
JOHN GALEN HOWARD
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SAN FRANCISCO
JOHN HOWELL

1913

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WELCOMER THE CORDIALEST
CRITIC THE MOST SEARCHING
FRIEND THE FAITHFULEST

THIS IMAGINED FACE

Within the sixty-nine years of Filippo Brunelleschi's life, Italy passed from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance. More than three-quarters of a century before the great architect was born his most famous work, the cathedral dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, had been foreshadowed by Arnolfo di Cambio, the original architect of the building; but though the cathedral had, by Brunelleschi's time, been mostly finished otherwise, the vast octagonal space over the crossing still remained without a roof, for lack of an architect with the skill and courage to formulate a plan and carry out the task. These and other necessary qualities Brunelleschi alone possessed. Actual construction was begun by him twenty-six years before his death, but he was fated to see completed only the main portion of the dome. The crowning lantern was finished in accordance with his design, years after he was gone, by Michelozzo, once (and always) his pupil, later his rival, and finally his successor.

The action of the piece occupies one fine April day, a brief interval of vigor in Brunelleschi's last illness. The aged architect, realizing that death is at hand, has determined upon a last visit to the dome. The first scene is at dawn, in Brunelleschi's room at the top of his house in Florence, near the cathedral, which is to be seen through the open window. The second scene is at mid-day within and on the dome. The third scene is at sunset on the slopes of San Miniato overlooking Florence, with the dome in the middle distance. Throughout the piece Brunelleschi alone speaks.

*To climb the summit of the centuries
And orb their life in skiey stone!*

BRUNELLESCHI

PART I—MORNING

TIME: *April, 1446. Daybreak.*

SCENE: *An upper room, Florence. The Dome is seen beyond.*

PERSONS: *Filippo Brunelleschi and his adopted son, Andrea. Brunelleschi speaks.*

AT LAST!—Now Dawn hath like a serpent slipt
Her shroud of murk oblivion and glides
Fresh-panoplied with jewels forth from night!
Awake, Andrea! For today once more,
5 After these bedrid æons, would my feet
The sky-bound platform of my Dome achieved
Enjoy. Upon this day will I go up
Into that mountain for a last farewell!

Withdraw the hangings, that I well may see
10 From this dim corner, framed with chambered gloom's
Delicious flood of ambient morning air,
My blossom-bubble of frail fabric sheen,
Atingle with the day, still sweet with dew
And rosy thro' dawn's pearl. More fully draw

BRUNELLESCHI

15 The grapy damask from the pouring rays
Until its glinting dragons drown in dregs
And these used eyes, antiqued with Roman wont,
Joy in divine proportion.

So! Such forms

20 As I have builded should be ever seen—
Unless it be beneath the frameless vault
Of circumambient ensconcing skies—
As now thro' archèd oblongs exquisite.

Perfection! 'Tis a beauty such, methinks,
25 As none but he who made can utterly
Delight in! Ha! Arnolfo, how would you
Lift eyes in prayer could you but see this heaven
I've crowned your space withal! Could you forgive,
In jealousy for thine own striving hand,
30 My bettering your best? As well as I
Forgive your crouching Atlas that his brawn
Reeks not of facture mine, each toiling stone
Bone of my bone, and toil of my long toil,
To hold my heavens up to Majesty!
35 Vain for the God-in-us to crave the all—
Not to derive, or flash like glinting beads
On whirlwind skirts of cataracts of power,
But in imperious oneness to ordain

MORNING

And to suffice! Vain, for at very best
40 We wilful makers are but shreds and waifs
Of urgent godhead, and our mightiest throes
Of will creative are but gentlest breaths
Out of almighty nostrils. Yet meseems—
And thus I justify my headiness—
45 God maketh best by human instruments,
Thro' secondary act of primal power.
Nor seas nor mounts nor all His wheeling hosts
Outweigh perchance the breath from poets' lips,
Or radiance elusive of the light
50 That quicks dead walls touched deathless by the brush;
How, then, with domes that span with wingèd stones,
Wrought to live purpose by mere act of mind,
Void space above Christ's holy shrine? Naught greater
God hath created than my blushing Dome,
55 The virgin breast of Florence! There hath art
Touched the high term of beauty. 'Tis of God,
Solely of God. He thro' my tangled brain
Conceived and did; nor thro' my brain alone
But thro' the countless minds whose heritage
60 Mine hath but garnered, and their teeming house
Set now at last in order. Most of all
From him (high heart) my fountains take their rise
Who first laid down the pregnant octagon,

BRUNELLESCHI

And visioned it o'erswept and glorious
65 With wingèd earth-stuff rapturously enskied.

Timid that profile as it budded first
Within his mind's of-God-impregnate womb?
"Timid and paltry" were the words I used
To hammer home a truth they would not heed,
70 Those close *maestri*, with their padlockt heads
Nodding and knocking woodenly of rules
And precedent, and of the high respect
Due to Arnolfo's sacred memory.

But which is he who most respects the law—
75 He whom the letter circumscribes and kills,
Or he within whose soul law's soul strikes root,
Bursting the bonds of its enjailing shell
To amplify forever? Words I used
In heat to clench a white-hot argument
80 I used with purpose underneath my heat,
With cold and tempered purpose, for those words—
Those hateful words—applied not to the thought
Arnolfo sowed, a seed of the sublime,
But to the minds that saw sublimity
85 Curtailed and wingless, and were satisfied.
I spake Arnolfo, and my words drove home.
I markt the wincing eyelash and the flinch

MORNING

Of the touched raw; and "Florence with a dome
Timid and paltry! Inconceivable
90 And not to be endured!" they each and all
Trod toe on heel in protest.

So my point
And the first glory of the Dome were won.
For 'tis alone by that uplifting wall
95 The form voluptuous above gets wings
For soaring free to empyreal power.
So is Arnolfo's thought empedestaled,
Rapt from closed budhood and out-flowered in joy
Amid the blue, unhampered unaware,
100 Its will achieved, its yearning in repose.
'Tis so forever in the life of thought;
Expression goes not home, knows not its ends,
If it be not detach't, distinguish't, throned,
Set high apart and sacredly enshrined.
105 'Twas so our Florentine his Comedy
Put at awe's distance by the awesome form
Wherewith he clothed his vision's universe,
And, by removing, brought his vision home,
A universal knock at each heart's door.
110 Only a few can cluster round a spring
Hid among sedges secretly and shy;
But hang its gauzy gladness o'er the cliff

BRUNELLESCHI

And each who looks may mark it for his own.
Lift thou thy thought into the upper air
115 If thou wouldst speak beyond the reach of death!

So bloomed Arnolfo's buddings at my hands.
Him hail I grandsire; thro' these clogging veins
Still riot gladsome drops I owe to him,
When I but think upon him. 'T was a man,
120 God's image manned with God's first attribute—
The potent will creative—that conceived
Yon form of loveliness, and dared its plan.
From him most I derive, and have a pride
To flow from such a source; 'tis but the mood
125 That marks me maker when I jealous am
Of aught that seems to minish mine own strength
Or to condition its forth-putting. Now,
When my last journey I must soon take up
(Who knoweth to what bourn?) and all alone,
130 As never yet I journeyed, let these words,
As if they were my latest breath, sink deep
Into thy heart of hearts, beloved son—
Heart of my heart, tho' wanting blood of mine—
More closer for my loving, not my lust.
135 I, whom my Florence placeth up, alone,
At last after these fifty years of fight,

MORNING

Owe all I am to my progenitors,
Not of the flesh alone—nay, surely—but
To those now nameless dead whose godlike stuff
140 Of the imagination ever fed
And feeds my inmost being. He who gave
His gift in but a breath of living thought—
Caught from the whisper of a passing Power,
Misunderstood or haply misapplied,
145 But quick—hath given that without which I
Had languisht or gone down. In reverence
For the unending sacred stream of life
Which is but God, I pass my portion on
To him who follows after. May my thought
150 Be fruitful and increase in many minds
Yet to be born in lands beyond my ken.
Haply there shall arise on crest of time
Some spirit—nay, some spirits—packt with power,
Who, building on my thought, shall raise up piles
155 More mighty than my mightiest, yet give
To me the guerdon of their deeds divine.
So is my meed most his who went before.

Ev'n as I speak, see how the April sun,
Fresh from his dip in nightly Lethe, springs
160 Fleet-footed from the hills, his earliest glance

BRUNELLESCHI

- Kindling the snowy topping of the Dome,
Unfinisht yet and webbed with scantling gold
That, lacelike, masks the inward loveliness.
Now slide the rays adown the swelling mound—
165 A lover's touch that swift with young desire
Caresses and compels voluptuous form.
From out the dusk of dawning, sweet emerge
Chaste raptures of pale marble, veining soft
The roseleaf-luscious languor of that hill
170 All virginal. And now the eager light
Hath like a lover swept the immaculate
And taken all . . . as Christ, our light of lights
And days' eternal day, would sweep to Him
The budding ripeness of His mystic bride.
- 175 'Tis time I left this palsied pallet. Now,
And for the last time—oh! I feel it snap
My fragile heart-strings—shall I mount that height
Whereto my life hath been pledged utterly.
No more with pride imperial shall I set
180 These feet upon the rung to the sky's gates,
Nor o'er these lips may ever burst again
The voice of fiat; but a suppliant,
Kneeling the steps of Christward penitence,
I will up-crawl, a worm before the Throne.

MORNING

185 Even to rise from this strait couch I need
Thy arm, Andrea; and thy filial word—
'Tis strange how deep its sound doth penetrate
And how it easeth me. When I am gone
'Tis thou I would have make my monument;
190 'Tis so perchance thou hast a chance to live.
Nay, be not vexed; we be no flatterers,
To scum salt hearts with sweetness, thou and I.
What I to thee, say thou unto the world;
What I of thee, say thou of me abroad,
195 Nor paint me beauteous; but as thou hast seen,
So show me forth. It is one half my pride
That I have won, being but what I am,
A pint-pot scrub, so full of cranky whims
And desperate abridgments that all maids
200 Have said me nay, till, in the lapse of time,
My heart hath turned unto the like of thee,
And made me father all vagaries thine.
It were quaint justice, shouldst thou live thro' me
In thy presentment, since thou lack'st my blood
205 Yet call'st me father. Make my monument!

And while thou help'st me to put on these stuffs
More joyous for the sackcloth of my soul
(Which men must spy not) I'll beguile the hour

BRUNELLESCHI

With memories; for I have never told
210 Even to thee one half the struggles deep
Wherethro' I've waded to this shore of years.
Nor shall I now, nor could I; yet, in part,
Since thou must make me live when I am dead,
'Tis fitting thou shouldst glimpse my battle-field
215 Before we knew ourselves as son and sire
In the calm evening of my agony,
That smoothed the pathways of thy morning life.

Thou know'st my model for Lorenzo's doors;
Thou know'st my model for yon soaring Dome;
220 Betwixt those two there yawned a score of years
Empty of all achievement visible
But packt with gnawing hell. I knew my power,
For it was very I—I breathed and drank,
Waked, slept and lived it. In my deepest soul
225 There was no cranny but was crank with it.
And in my mind imagination still
And sleeplessly did live with gaping space
O'ercrowned and perfected. An instinct 't was,
More not-to-be-denied than rousèd lust—
230 A lust indeed instinctive and more hot,
More exigent, than fleshly longings—that
With a consuming summons called me on

MORNING

To close vast spaces in. 'T was born in me
As hunger in all creatures, nor less fierce.

235 But I recall, as men recall first love,
The hour when first in fire from out the blue
The bolt of conscious will to live or die
For that desire—to make it good—smote thro'
To gushing springs of being.

240 But a lad,
A mean, frail shred of boyhood, was I then—
Ten years or suchlike. All the town was mad
With joy and with acclaim that Giotto's tower,
That half a century was building, was topt out.

245 And I, with other urchins, half a score—
Lorenzo one of them of course—slipt by
The jealous wardens and made holiday
All up the dizzy wonder to the roof.
Once there, the keeper panting in pursuit,
250 We rompt around the hanging parapet
In shrillest glee, with taunts scarce circumspect
For him who followed fast; till finally
He herded all save but Lorenzo's self
And me down thro' the scuttle. We escaped
255 That ignominy by a sudden dodge
And found ourselves alone in the pale blue.

BRUNELLESCHI

We both had kindled with the kindled town,
And in our hearts there throbbed a riot joy
That Giotto's genius now was culminate
260 Full two score years since he was in his grave.
The people's exaltation scarce was less
Than when not long ago we capt the Dome;
And we small slips of callow artistry
Were fired with sense of genius. Scarcely friends
265 Were we, even as children—too unlike
Our natures were to coalesce in love;
But we were friendly till that tower-top hour.
There our ways parted. And they never since
Have met but they have crost.
270 From that great height
We lookt together o'er the bristling town,
Sawed with the holds of lordlings, and in pride
Each told upon his fingers each proud house
He held allegiance unto. Hardly once
275 My score agreed with his. My friends and his
Might have inhabited two separate worlds,
So far apart our standards and our kin.
Boys take these things more seriously than men,
Even in Florence, and incipient heat
280 Burned in each reddening cheek, despal's flag.
It was when we had warmed to boast and taunt,

MORNING

Boy-fashion, that we wheeled and o'er the church
Alongside bent our downward gaze. At odds
In family allegiance, more at odds
285 We were, and came to fisticuffs, thereon.
To me the yawning chasm, that markt the dome
Arnolfo had imagined, was a lure,
A challenge, a delight; to him a snare,
A fearsome bungle—worse, disaster sure,
290 If it indeed with stone must be o'erspanned.
Then sprang my fate to saddle and I cried,
“'Tis cowardice to drivel such a lie!
Think you Arnolfo knew not what he did
When he foresaw that gaping hole? I know
295 It can be vaulted, and I'll do it, too!”

'Twas sixty years ago, well nigh; yet now
I still can feel my cheek grow hot and cold
With that unreasoned and divine control
Which hath sustained me ever, but first then
300 Made manifest my business. 'Twas Christ's will
That I should heal that emptiness! And when,
In after time, the years dragged on and on,
Defeat succeeding failure, and naught moved
That cumbersome machine the *Opera*—
305 Or, moved, they did but jangle their minds' chains,

BRUNELLESCHI

Creakt dry old catchless cogs, and spat out dust—
I oft have cast me on my bended knees
And sought new guidance; and as oft His hand
Have felt uplift me till my doubt was done.

310 But this was later—boys have little care
But that their wills will carry; as for me,
As boy I never doubted. My first doubt
Came at same hand as my first certainty—
Lorenzo's—but not doubt anent the Dome,
315 Nor doubt so much about myself as him.
When he and I lockt horns over the bronze
That was to seal the doorless baptistry,
Then first I saw him as a power. Till then,
All thro' our prentice days, I'd thought of him
320 As but a plodding potterer, a fond
And fearful searcher-out of vanities
Who never knew his mind, and took the world
Into his confidence to fix him one.
But when the models for the gates were shown,
325 Our two—Lorenzo's and my own—stood out
Together, peers incomparable; so
The town and all did say. And some inclined,
And not a few, to mine. But in my heart
I knew that his was finer, and with pain

MORNING

- 330 I marveled wherefore. How could such a mind,
So feeble in conception, indirect,
And blown about by every gust that came,
Produce a thing so exquisite? It balkt
My being. And 'twas from that hour I knew
335 Not force can work the marvel but the long
Inveterate travail of the soul. I saw
My Abraham a pattern of myself—
Hot to the deed, e'en odious. Odious thought,
To minds like mine, that they must clip will's wings
340 To plod in patience the long paths to power,
And know the bloody scourging of defeat,
Ere they may make the mile-stone of success.
That price for one thing gladly would I pay;
The Dome, my idol, that I'd buy with life!
345 But when the masters offered half the task
Of the contested bronzes to myself
To work at with Lorenzo I refused,
Too filled with loathing for his niggling ways,
Too filled with awe at his divine result.
350 "His is the best; give it to him!" I said.
"He is a sculptor; I an architect!"
This I had added, but my soul was sore
With its first search by doubt and questioning.

BRUNELLESCHI

I was a boy then still—oh, twenty-four,
355 But tardy riping. Architects take time.
And I was yet to strive a score of years
Ere I was let put shoulder to the task
I lived but to accomplish. Had I known,
My patience might have flagged; but eager hope
360 Shone gorgeous from my fog of doubt; I knew,
Better for my defeat, the only road
For me to victory. An architect
Essential to the core was I, as sure
As was Ghiberti sculptor; nay, as sure
365 As Donatello was so, even then,
In careless ladhood, recognized and loved
As such by me and cherisht; and as sure
As was my dear Masaccio painter, then—
Nay, on that instant, mayhap—being born,
370 So soon to flame to genius most divine,
A beauteous meteor in our morning skies,
So soon to sink and vanish ere the day,
Far sowing sky-seed.

Donatello then—

375 As much chagrined, more than as much elate,
As I at the strife's ending, for his model gained,
For such a child, proud praise—struck palm to palm
With me, his elder by a half, that we would go

MORNING

And seek art's fountain-head together. Word
380 Came down the wind, from none knows whence,
That the old ways were wanting. All the air
Was rife with spirit not to be defined
As of new dawn upon the bleakness past.
And we, in whom the very heart of spring
385 Leapt riotous with promise, strapt our packs
And made off madly down the lane to Rome.
Scarce we lookt back, or if our eyes reglimpsed
The ancient cincture with its pride of towers—
This withèd fagot buncht with beetling threat—
390 'Twas not with wish to linger, but as one
Who from a loved and longed-for mistress goes
To hazard fortune for her—sooner gone
The sooner come again—nor lets his love
Slacken his pace wide-worldwards.
395 What to gain
Had we in mind up-treasured? Scarce we knew.
We but obeyed an instinct sharp as fate
That prickt us onward to an unknown goal.
Youth, and the restless anguish of defeat,
400 The sense of boundless spaces and of power
Unmeasured and immeasurable, life,
Love, faith, and God—these filled our consciousness.
Rough was the way; our purse made Friday-fare;

BRUNELLESCHI

Our packs tho' slender were too sore a load
405 (We wisht our packs and purses might exchange);
Yet we were joyous as two larks in spring
Loosed to the boundless ether, and our song
Piped heartfelt from high blue of times to be.
So hastened we, scarce witting, on to Rome.

410 And Rome repaid! Arnolfo was my sire,
But Rome the milky dam that gave me suck.
And Donatello—oh, the rapture keen
To watch him blossom in that garth of eld!
A downy velvet barely duskt his lip—
415 His hand, it was already man's; his mind
A forthright god's, creative; and his soul
Flower-sweetly childlike, as it still is so.
We lived as one. No nuptial bonds more close
Could wed two natures than our friendship bound
420 His heart and mine. We held each other's soul.
No deeps, no backs or eddies of our lives
Kept we o'er-glozèd from each other's view.
And as the years went on he kept me young,
Then and thereafter; my imprisoned soul,
425 Denied expression's vent, had grizzled else
And packt to crabbed hardness, impotent
To wield the power itself conceived and was.

MORNING

Love can no more than keep the channels free
Wherethro' may life tumultuous pour its flood.

430 And I—not Donatello only but
All Rome was mine, and all the boundless world
That was Rome. Of the heady cup of time,
Ripened within her deep-delved vaults, I drank
Deep and divinely till my soul was filled.
435 Wherever crumbling fragment broke the sod
In desert purlieus of the shrunken town
I grubbed and prodded with a fevered zeal
To have its secrets, as a dog will dig
To lay his fangs upon a cherisht bone
440 Stored ripe in burial. Little scaped my flair;
Tho' oft—as if a ghoul who sought in graves
Unholy treasure—I was driven forth
With harsh reviling; but as oft returned,
Until, with endless work, enormous store
445 Of measured pelf I had laid by—rich stuff
Wherewith I builded up anew in mind
August antiquity.

How 't was I lived,
Those roofless winters long, I hardly know,
450 So distanced are they and so blued with life.
My patrimony of a piece of land

BRUNELLESCHI

I'd sold when first I went from Florence—all
That I possessed save meager scraps of wage
I got from tasks that famine found at hand
455 To tide me over from one hungry spell
Until the next. Empty I workt for wage,
And filled I workt for glory, giving all,
All of my best, to living with the forms,
In crumbling and dishonored fragments hoar,
460 That clothed the ancient world, and glorified
Its all existence.

Oft when evening fell
And the encircling hills were aureoled
With sunset's flame, imperially clad
465 In purple from the deepening west, I walkt
In the dim dingle where the Forum lay
Already dipt in gloom as if its dreams
Of other days had brimmed it with a draft
Of bitter-sweetness. Round me cattle browsed
470 And silence was, where once the Cæsars sate
The throne of earth, amid the clang of arms
And babble of unnumbered multitudes,
Prankt with all gorgeousness from all the ends
Of prostrate empire. From the sweeping turf,
475 From tufted copses, rose into the dusk
Vast ghostly columns—giants, half their height

MORNING

Awful up-turreting, who stationed there
Consoleless, as unsavioed patriarchs
Kept state, imprisoned yet in limbo, ere
480 With love divine Christ stoopt to lift them out
Who else were pinioned there eternally,
Nor dead nor living, yet both dead and live.
And in the eerie gloaming I could deem
Those mighty forms out-raised to me their hands,
485 Mute supplicants for my compassion. "We,"
I mused them yearning, "are not blotcht with slime
That cankered empire; wherefore be we doomed
To stay discarded? Lift us to the light.
Our souls are heirs of beauty's golden prime,
490 And we bear message of that time serene
To future ages. List thou to our word
And speak it for us to the world. It waits!"

Like the rich wreckage of a treasure-fleet
Engulft beneath the ravening seas of time
495 With but the mastheads wind-bleacht, I divined
The wealth that lay corroding in sunk holds,
An age's ransom; and I set me on
More wilful to redeem to daily use
The wasting beauty. But of all the vast
500 Innumerably thronging vestiges

BRUNELLESCHI

Of ancient grandeur, two most filled my soul
With wonder and my mind with endless zeal
To have their hearts' whole secret out, and mine.
As never elsewhere, surely, 'tis within
505 The Amphitheater's o'erwhelming sweep
Conception grasps the miracle of Rome.
Within its awesome valley, walled about
By mountain ledges shelving to the blue,
Chaliced all empire. Whiles, at burning noon,
510 I sought the umbrage of the corridors
Which circle endlessly that vast ellipse
To scape the oppressive awe that reigned and smote
Within the roofless cincture, as old wine
Had sod all conscience with cupt day, until,
515 In anguish of sun-drunkenness, I fled
To vaulted twilight. Thence again, from dreams
Of glorious eld, refresht would I come forth
To witness Evening at her altar rites,
Coping the chalice with a filmy pall
520 Of gentian shadow like a brooding wing.
And whilom, when from out the mystic bowl
Brimmed with the purple sacrament of night
My mind had drunk oblivion, would my soul
Espouse in dreams the soul of ancientry.
525 'Tis from those spousals' sacred unison

MORNING

Have sprung these children fresh wherewith is sown
By us our Florence. Mother of our seed,
The Theater hath stood for worldly power
In spirit beauty, and hath vased the Word
530 That Rome too was a vessel of the shrine,
Whence after-time shall taste the sacrament.

Rome's sacred grandeur most the Theater,
But most Rome's unity the Pantheon
Symbols. Eternity! None other form
535 Of human handiwork so speaks that thought
With the unendedness that rounds it! Rome!
None other thought so keeps her puissance
As doth Eternity! One only creature
Of the almighty Mind, the ends of earth
540 Together all were gathered up within
One fascicle of governance, that there,
More certain of fruition, might be sown,
And endlessly disseminated, seed
Of life eternal. Prescient of its fate
545 As emblem of the empire, both of man
And of essential Wisdom, pagan priests
Did sanctify that temple to gods seven
Who o'er their darkness shed foreshadowing gleams
Of very God—to Time, to Power, to Swiftmess,

BRUNELLESCHI

550 Beauty, and Chastity, and, prince of these,
Love, and the Sword that Love is girt withal.
And so it stands epitome of Christ
And of His Church, in chaste perfection framed
And rounded into one with endless things.
555 Crumbled, without, and craggy from the storms
Of wasting winters and the ruthless hand
Of spoilers, scarce the eye discerns at first
A fearsome beauty, tho' the gracious porch
Prepares and wins one on to enter straight.
560 But like a saintly nature, cloistered close
'Neath sackcloth and a front of haggard want,
The spirit harbors there within, safe-shrined,
Sweet, and abundant. Swiftly, from the port,
Or ere the ponderous bronze hath clanged behind,
565 The entrant halts, with awe confounded. . . . God!
This is Thy House! . . . A cavern splendid, vast,
Aflood with golden mellowness of gloom,
Clothed with all sumptuous substance of the earth!
Around, no window breaks the stately file
570 Of niche and column, columned niche and wall;
But from above alone there swims the day,
A cirque of plumbless ether, thro' the dome
In benediction, like the eye of God
That looks serenely to the heart of things.

MORNING

575 Oft have I seen a sheaf of streaming rays
Pour thro' that sky-space from its fount unseen
And down the coffered facets of the vault
Strike seals of flaming gold as if the hand
Of the Almighty had reacht down and touched
580 To liquid life of fire the senseless stone,
Senseless no longer, but a sentient soul
Wrought inly.

There it was I gathered up,
To treasure in my inmost being, funds
585 Of inspiration and of reverence
I else had wanted for the mighty task
My mind made headway unto. Deep I searcht
Into its secret making. How, and why,
And in what sequence were the elements
590 That made that greatness, wrought by feeble hands
To power and beauty? If I gloated long
To find the chaste proportions of an arch
Or fix the spirit beauty of a shaft—
Just so much lengthened, so much viewless curve,
595 So burgeoned upward for the final grace—
How more, bethink thee, was I rapt and pledged
To master mastery in the mighty dome!

To build more beautiful was not for man;

BRUNELLESCHI

But might I reach its beauty? Not for me
600 The answer to that question. 'Twas perchance
A form less noble that I had to deal
Withal—for must the circle stand alone
As form of full perfection. And perchance
Some freer hand, less loyal to the scheme
605 Already sanctioned and imbedded deep
In fundamental feeling, had devised
Some fresh transition to the perfect form.
I know not; for my mind was fixed fast
On the solution of the hardy task
610 Arnolfo set. Its hardness made its charm
More subtle and more potent. And the end—
See! it is beautiful—and all my best
Have I poured out, thro' all, thro' all my life
To make it so. I will not question it!

615 But oh, the length of travail to that end;
To but the putting shoulder to the work;
To but the privilege to show my plan;
To but the right to speak before the Board;
To but the basis whereon I might speak;
620 To but the power to make that basis sure!
'Twas into that abyss the years still poured
The while I naught produced that might have lived

MORNING

Had I been taken off—nothing that lasts
Save friends and loving pupils. Cæsar so
625 Saw life pass by and leave him in the shade,
Whilst others pluckt their fruit and ate of it.
Men who are masterful beyond the bounds
Of their small epochs aye must wait till Time
Hath given the glass the allotted turnings slow
630 Ere to their stage the entrance-ways are cleared.
But meanwhile, thinkest theirs a grateful task,
To wait and watch the train of life go by
And eat their hearts out for the chance to live?
I saw Lorenzo swim the cresting wave
635 Of sunshine and success, and many more
Less gifted win a worthy place—just claims
Put forth to honor's lasting name—while I,
Conscious of greatness, kept the shadowy wings
And dull despised background of the scene.
640 Those were the years my heart had aged and tired,
Along with cooling blood and grizzling hairs,
Had I not felt me richly blossoming
In Donatello and Masaccio.
They spoke my message in the countless ways
645 The finger cannot follow, pouring forth
A freshening flood of thought not theirs the less

BRUNELLESCHI

For being pregnant with my spirit, ripe
With a sane wisdom that had ne'er obtained
In their unreasoned and impulsive power
650 Elsewise. Their essence was eternal youth
That knows no trammels and no even pace.
I steadied their swift hands. I trimmed their sails
In dangerous flaws. Well—I, Filippo, played
Lorenzo's rôle to their Filippo's! See?
655 I kept them careful, for the vital sap
They kept alert in me.

Supple—and sweet,
I hope, a little—those two kept my heart
By their large understanding and rich power
660 Of swift sure sympathy that glimpsed an end,
No sooner shadowed by my first essay.
They trailed my mind-ways by their insight keen.
Their live encouragement establisht rock
Under frail fancy's outworks, till defense
665 Took shape aggressive of fixt purposes
That lookt cock-sure unyieldingness—no more—
To minds that gallopt up, and off. They say
I'm set, that nothing budges me; nor guess
How I have lived but by encouragement—
670 I cannot breathe else. But the type of mind
Far alienate from mine, which little brings

MORNING

To stir my consciousness, which little pricks
The spur of my presentment, I oppose
With stolid fixèdness. And then some say

675 That I am wilful and contrarious.

Will were not will were it not wilful! Will
Were needful to a waiting task, and mine
Hath mostly been but waiting.

But enough

680 Of such philosophy! 'Twas back and forth
Thro' twenty arduous years, 'twixt schoolmate Rome
And mistress Florence, ere the dangling prize
Plumpt in my pocket, and e'en yet with thorns
Thereto that kept it unenjoyable.

685 Lorenzo, yoked with me in equal power—

A doomed duumvirate! In earlier days
I had refused to weight him with my hand
Upon his shoulder whilst he made his gates.
I knew the folly of such harnessing,

690 And while it galled me gave him liberal rein
To win his laurels. Now my score of years
Must go to feed his emptiness.

No more

Knew he of building than his potter's clay.

695 He had been taskt at the minutest things—
Gates, glass, and gildings for the altar-top;

BRUNELLESCHI

And ne'er his eye had scanned a broader space
Than his two hands; or, if it scanned, with fear.
Ah! but he'd had the wisdom sane-insane
700 To join the Guild of Builders—to what end
Requires more wisdom than I've gleaned to guess;
For I think he intrigued not for the Dome—
He feared it, rather. But he'd not the grace—
When, as Filippo's opposite and so
705 The one most like to chasten, he was drawn
To yoke-up with me—flatly to refuse,
As decency required. A useless pall
Of lead hung on me was he from the first;
And had it not been like the great refusal
710 To cast aside the task that heaven had set,
And peevishly to mope because full sway
I could not have, I should have said them nay.
“Or he or I; not both!” But for that he
Was useless, and well knew him so, and that
715 I knew that canny time would show it out,
I took what I could get, one half the laud
And twice the task—to count his presence there
At least the burthen of the task itself!
So we were off at last.
720 But now let's off
And scale my mountain wonder! Once again

MORNING

Ere they cease breathing, glad these nostrils mine
Shall scent the azure gardens of the sky
From that high hollow hill, my bloom of blooms—
725 The wonder-blossom of this town of flowers—
Fairest corolla of this flower of towns!

BRUNELLESCHI

PART II—NOON

TIME: *The same. Midday.*

SCENE: *Within and on the Dome of Santa Maria del Fiore.*

PERSONS: *Brunelleschi and Andrea; and later Donatello
and the workmen on the Dome. Brunelleschi speaks.*

IS DONATELLO there? I count on him
To give a note of gala to this last
Brief junket to the clouds. Astonishing
730 How he keeps up that spirit! To be sure
He hath but three score spring-tides to his name,
And that's still April if the wind is right
(And you are Donatello) e'en suppose
You have two hearts, and one of them mine own,
735 To wean from winter! April sure'll be May,
With him along—not even last good-byes
Could hold out showery 'gainst that sunniness.
On, then! Belike we'll find him at the top,
Where suns belong. Not earth could keep him down.
740 He floats upon the world like buoyant gold
On quicksilver.

BRUNELLESCHI

How steep these steps, to feet
With loads less light, prickt on by will so e'er
To win the azure! Three score years and nine
745 Had never ventured to essay them, but
That two score planned them, and that three score's gone
Already to their summit, blithe as morn.
Yet nor so endless many nor so steep
As steps impalpable I clomb of yore
750 To give these day! I've earned them, and I've paid
High value for their steepness, o'er and o'er
Redoing in the undoing dark the deed
Each day had ended.

Let me catch my breath,
755 Ere we climb on, behind this parapet.

Again I shall not see thee, Florence, lie
In languid loveliness beneath, thy towers
Reversing in perspective, vanisht down
And reaching earthwards, where I soon shall lie.
760 How I have loved thee! Me no nuptial joys
Have weaned from oneness with thy spirit's flower,
Out-blossomed from my bosom. Only thee
My heart hath yearnèd unto. Only thee
My soul hath known in rapture. Only thee!
765 Take thou this child that hath been born of us

NOON

In spirit spousals, and upon thy breast
Bear it forever as my pledge of troth
In Heaven. All my being be up-caught
And mystic-corporate therein with thine,
770 A thing eternal, and forever thou!

And now the Stygian narrows of the stair
Pent sidewise upward 'twixt the double vault,
O'erarcht and buttressed round and overthwart!
A breathing at each peep-hole—mind you that!
775 Ha! Glimpse by glimpse we'll sum our Florence up,
Minutest miniatures of beauty all.

First, over there's Palazzo Vecchio,
The hoar old war-horse, armored cap-a-pie
And shadowy-visored, thrusting high his fist
780 Fierce-clencht and mailèd, ready for the blow.

And now Or San Michele, in surprise,
Lifts eyebrows o'er all shoulders round about,
As who should watch, what tho' the neighbors drowse.

Then there's sweet Arno, lady lakelet slim,
785 Aslipping 'neath her bridges thro' the town
As sleek as satin with her silvery smile.

BRUNELLESCHI

And here we have a band of citizens—
Sky-lofty turrets—sullenly athreat,
Each scowling at the other. Still is War
790 Our patron spirit tho' o'erwreathed with flowers.

But stay! Our fateful Chain! I nearly bruised
My head against your elbows, my good friend.
A trifle rude to punch your papa so!
'Twas I that fathered you—remember well!
795 And what a botch Lorenzo made when he
Pretended he knew all there was to know
Of such as chains! We should have had our Dome
About our heads if he had had his way.
Oh, wondrous days that dropt a farthing dip
800 Into the bushel-basket of the Board!
I didn't have to make believe sick, as,
In dudgeon, some of them made out I did.
I was beyond endurance sick of him,
Lorenzo, and of seeing him about
805 And looking wise and careful and as if
It all depended on him, when the most
He ever ventured was to hem and haw
When I was by, and then to put a spoke
In every wheel behind my back. Why can't
810 A man know what he's fit for? He can make,

NOON

If there's but time, a marvel of a door.
I'm free to say the one he's making now
(And has been making since I can recall)
Will far outdo the best was ever cast

- 815 If he but keep it up. But as for domes—
Well, domes are not his art, and mine they are.
He wouldn't utter word when I was ill,
He was so frightened—let the time drag on,
With nothing building, till the men were wild
820 To get ahead and the whole town was dazed
To see the work stop short, and all the crew
Idle and boozing round the place. You see
The work had reacht a stage most critical.
The overhanging, inward, of the stone
825 Was now so great the men all feared to work
(No wonder, too) unless a scaffolding
And hoardings were set up. And then again
The binding-chain to keep the upper works,
Once built, from thrusting out in vast collapse
830 Must now be placed. A subtle problem each.

When once I got about again I saw
The time had come for action. All the town
Was rife with rumors most discreditable.
The Dome was doomed—nay, damned. The very men

BRUNELLESCHI

835 On whom I most depended were at point
Of mutiny, infect with panic fear
Even to mount the works—reflection sure
Of poor Lorenzo's feebleness. Rule men
By vacillation? Never! Certainty—
840 That is your cue for masters. But be sure
Your certainty is safe—else failure sure!
Not needful best, but good—the chance to prove
What's best will come only when all is done,
The thing already judged as right. Not art
845 I'm speaking of, but action. Action then,
Not art, was needful. And I acted soon.
"You see," I said, "the folly of two men
As masters of one task. Nor he nor I
Is master while we both are so. Divide
850 The work. There are two tasks at hand. Give him
His choice."

Lorenzo-like he chose the chain—
And lucky 't was. The scaffold was the road
To instant credit and to confidence,
855 Tho' but the moment's makeshift; while the chain
Scarce mattered for the nonce, tho' pregnant 't was
With future fate for good or ill—a dome
Or a disaster.

Half an hour's enough

NOON

- 860 (When you have travailed half a life before
To meet that half-hour) to show forth a scheme,
And match with manhood. Scarcely that, it was,
Before my men were eager to begin,
So simple and so safe my method was,
865 So entertaining in its childlikeness,
Like most big things. And while Lorenzo sweat
About one foolish lap of chain, we slung
Our scaffold quite around, a perfect trough
To work in.
- 870 But the chain? The Dome hung now
'Twixt heaven and earth—'twixt fortune and the grave—
And I was taskless, all my men dismissed,
Waiting until Lorenzo's work was done.
You see the situation. I must be
875 Called in, advised with; and on such a thing
As he had botcht but one report could make—
'Twas worthless. Easy as I might I was
On old Lorenzo; easy could not be.
He was a good man in the wrongest place.
880 I set him down as lightly as I could—
To his relief, I'm sure. Tho' he took care
To draw his stipend for a year or so
His ghost was laid. No more he haunted me.

BRUNELLESCHI

And big he showed—most unexpected big—
885 When later on he let me lend a hand
At casting his great bronzes; ne'er a word
To sting regret within me to remorse.
Take thou not queer Lorenzo for a cad;
He's good-sort human, inwardly—deep in!

890 One other battle royal must I win
Ere the Dome reacht its zenith. Some my men,
Pampered with adulation by the crowd
(For now the Dome so marcht they thought themselves,
And were thought of as heroes on the pave—
895 Lordly aristocrats of labor), some
Began to say, "The Dome is ours. We hold
In our right hands its making. Not again,
Should we drop out, could they our places fill.
And not again, when this is finisht, we
900 Shall chance upon its like, for livelihood.
Who locketh not his larder soon shall lack.
Let us but smite now while the iron is hot
And reap our harvest!" Mingled metaphors
That matcht their logic lame! I felt the storm
905 In the close sullen weather of their look
When for the ordering of the hourly task
I voiced my will; tho' I no notice took

NOON

Lest the storm break—perchance it might blow o'er.

But naught save thunder eases thunder-heads;

910 So they played Jove a while, and thundered sore.

But architecture is not solitaire.

The Dome was not my making, nor was't theirs.

It was the town's. And deep in principle

I saw their claims a menace, even tho'

915 The letter of their law seem righteous.

There!

Thro' this last loophole ere we gain the top,

See you the lift serene of Giotto's tower?

'Twas there I poised my purpose. Oft and oft,

920 When the crowd cramped me and I needed air

Of solitude to breathe me to myself,

I climbed the lonely terrace of the tower

To see things whole, unfrittered by detail,

As one might pray upon a mountain-top.

925 First, as a child, I there had glimpsed the Dome

Achieved—me dedicate to its achievement.

Fateful perspective! So I gained a force

Of singleness and wholeness always there

On the sky-platform. So it stands to me

930 Supreme in purpose—loftiest poise of power,

And fairest marriage of the earth with heaven

BRUNELLESCHI

Man's hand hath coupled, as 't were hand of God's.
An hour in skydom cleansed my turbid mind
That it pellucid ran and forceful. Straight
935 Across the interval 'twixt mount and mount
I flung my manifesto—oh, not heard
Of course by those who swarmed the scaffoldings,
But thus I eased me—and a breathless hour
Made good my wind-tossed challenge. They must go!
940 Their claims were canceled. Florence was the source
Whence sprang the undertaking, and her weal
Was paramount. I would not see her held
And throttled by a gang of thugs whose palms
Were itching but for lucre. They must go!
945 No explanation gave I, for he saps
The argument of force who salves the blow
With vain palaver; simply—they must go!

This was a Saturday. On Monday morn
I had a crew of masons at the Dome
950 Gathered in secret on the Sunday night
And pledged to silence till they came to work.
Before the week was up the game was won;
My old crestfallen foreman came to beg
For reinstatement with the other men.
955 And was I glad to get them back? At wage

NOON

Lower than they had got before the fight!
They've never bothered since.

But hist! I hear

Their voices as we near their height, down thro'
960 The hatchway floating. Bless 'em, how they sing
At the blest work like larks amid the blue—
The thugs I kept from pelf at point of sword!
They are my very hands, did they but know.
Ah, but they need my hand to keep 'em so!

965 One more good breathing and we are arrived.
The air is hereabouts more heavenly pure
Than even nature's mountain-summits shed
Upon the jaded spirit. Mary's fane
Climaxeth to most freshing loveliness
970 Thus claspt by boundless-breathing heaven.

At last!

It's rare to climb a mountain thro' a cave,
And burst from shelving twilight on a world
Aglitter!

975 And aglitter with such gauds!
My Donatello, like the sun himself
For bravery! This golden doublet well
Becomes thy youth. The basket must be full,
Or must have been ere gleaming coin like this

BRUNELLESCHI

980 Leakt out of it. My cup had not been full
Hadst thou not come this day to celebrate
My last up-coming with me.

Greetings all!

Hands all, you make a marvel. Music ne'er
985 Rang true as ring your trowels. Steel on stone—
They be my troubadours!

Among the clouds

This fabric's marble all immaculate
Finds fit and friendly home; their milky breasts
990 Are not more spotless than our shrine that lifts
Its perforate ecstasy of chiseled snow
Into the airy zenith, point and spire
Of symbolized sweetness to the sons of men—
A lily whose frail petals turn aback
995 In dimpling whorls around the claspèd bud
In rippling splendor of last loveliness,
One with the heavens. That is my dream of dreams.
Might I but live to see it blossom forth!

But you, dear friends, let them not change my plan!
1000 You know the wonders that have been proposed—
The witless schemes that, since we closed the Dome,
The know-alls have put forward—I, of course,
The Dome's imaginer, incapable

NOON

Of capping it, tho' all the world beside
1005 Know how it should be finisht! You recall
The lady Gaddi's topknot? Milliners,
March hares, and mountebanks are fecund all
At capping climaxes of shrine-work. Bah!
At heights where genius trembles lest it fall
1010 You'll find all such folk quite at home. That's why,
In fear of future patchwork when no more
By sonneteering I can silence them,
I have forestalled suggestions with cut stone—
Enough, they say, to build another church
1015 Atop o' this! So be't—a shrine apart
To yearn and soar unfaltering up the blue!
All's done but setting, and that goes apace,
Thanks to these faithful hands—if faithful kept!

How lang'rous up the hills the town is lapt—
1020 In crumbled velvet the long river-plain
Clothing, and lipping o'er each undulance
Like rugs rich-piled from morning's ancient looms;
All generously dyed with smoky hues
Of ochres and of umbers and of earths
1025 Riped rusty-ruddy 'neath hoar brooding suns,
And dull film-bloomed as dusty leopard-skins!
Never I knew Val d'Arno sweet as now

BRUNELLESCHI

When bitter mingles with its sweetness that
I nevermore may view it thus, above,
1030 Master, and one with this my mastery.
Never were hills so lusciously embloomed
With florent verdancy as these mine eyes—
Waxt living things endowed with super-sense,
The all-life sentience that's the architect's—
1035 Now breathe and drink into their inmost self
And clasp with love's embraces to their heart
In ecstasy of voiceless longing! Ah!
This bitter-sweetness of last times! Ah me!

Look where I will there leap to life renewed
1040 Remembrances that lift the tapestry
Of three score cycles 'fore me. O'er again,
Within a moment's musing, all my life
I pass in swift review, as men who drown,
Adrown in azure. But look where I will
1045 I see no task accomplisht—all's to do
As were I yet a youth untried. Naught save
My tiny cell in Santa Croce's garth
Of all the tasks is nested quite, and that
Least wingèd of them all. Had I but come
1050 Of age ere one-and-forty there'd been time
To round the region of a full career

NOON

And to define its cincture. Now, I know
That when my lamps are out there may be some
Who faithfully will strive not to belie
1055 The large, serene intent wherewith I wrought;
That comforts me. But still there'll many be
Who wilfully or wantonly will work,
Or ignorantly, to bring all to naught
My doing and obscure my meaning. They
1060 Are in my bosom who'll betray my art—
Well-meaning Frank and others of his ilk.
And out beyond my circle close of those
Whose hands are as my living flesh, whose faith
Will guard my concept as their very own,
1065 Are countless whom my rimèd darts have barbed
To rankle 'gainst me. They have dogged my steps
With fangs and yelping, and have clogged my course
With sand and quagmires of primed argument
Thro' all my life, till now the hour's at hand
1070 When I must leave chaotic all my works—
My realm unwalled, exposed to free attack,
My song unsung, my visions unfulfilled—
All, all my tasks loose-ended. Was e'er life
So full of labors and so void of deed?
1075 I reap not who have sown—my tragedy,
Perchance all life's. Yet I'd not change my strife

BRUNELLESCHI

Of seed-time for their harvest who ne'er knew
The sweat of sowing, the sharp appetite
And savor of the furrow. Furrowed deep
1080 My Florence is by this right hand of mine,
And seeded by this brain's broad sowing, lopt
To the quick sap, and pleacht to fruitfulness.

Down there below the serried gable-saw
Of Santa Croce nests my dewy lark,
1085 My one lone birdling with a trill in flower.
It harps my heart-strings. Santo Spirito
Across the river gropes into his own,
Serene and spacious tho' fragmental still.
And San Lorenzo, yet a king uncrowned!
1090 All, all unfinisht; e'en my palaces,
That came too late, late autumn's bounty scant,
To set their fruit ere niggard-nipping frost —
Children of chillèd loins that must be riped
Orphans on wind-blown leafless branches. All,
1095 All, all are poniards in me.

Ah, but most —
More than mine own, deep biters as they be —
Rankles that smooth-faced house of Cosimo,
Dark-veilèd this steep noon, usurping where
1100 By right my sun-bright portent should have shone

NOON

But for one highwayman. With shrewdest steel
Of smug and smiling treachery my friend,
Smug smiling Michelozzo, reacht me once
Full in the back when I mistook him for
1105 My armed support, my friend as yours, and one
Of our close circle. Him upon my knee
I'd dandled, fed good pap of artistry,
Bred form and feature to, and to the world
Issued, stampd sound and skilful. You recall
1110 How he was with us ever on the works
Hanging upon our words; not venturesome
To have his say, as having naught to speak,
But drinking ever from your cup and mine
And cameling for use in desert thirsts.
1115 Not without talent—oh, I grant you that—
A gift for gathering and storing up
Of all that might contribute to his end
Of making good, will-nilly, with the world!
A skilled manipulator, subtly framed
1120 To pouch the game,—the more that him no pains
Preoccupy with the beyond of deed,
Its furthermost significance and range.
He's no creative mind, that leaps forthright
Beyond the oilèd smoothness of the known,
1125 The safe, the rutted road, to regions far,

BRUNELLESCHI

Incalculable, challenging, where firsts,
Firsts only among minds, dare venture. No!
Essential seconds are his kind, who sift
What betters ravish from the void, and do
1130 In shelter of past judgments what the firsts
Conceive, attempt, but fail to bring to end
Because they stumble up untrodden paths.

Look there!—and there! My Pitti's tortoise-walls
That creep to being—and his Medici!
1135 His sudden palace rubbing-of-the-lamp
Hath safe the plaudits of our yesterdays;
My plodder shall go far—tomorrow's praise
May make his pillow easy. And tho' now
For years his house hath harbored Medici
1140 And Pitti frets to see his pile not roofed,
Yet Medici is Pitti's get. 'Twas I
That set the pace of pride for Cosimo
He dared not venture; far too bold, it seems,
For craven times and hearts; but from the loins
1145 Of my great fancy sprang my rival's thought,
Tempered, and temperate, and fitting home
To commonplace of life, unriskful. Mine—
The motive Medici had spurned, rewrought
In power for Pitti (stript, alack, of all

NOON

1150 Its carven joy of gorgeous heraldry) —
There, late, too late, it rises; but a torse,
Yet of a god! It hath such bravery
Of bigness and proportion as the Torse,
Compact of vigorous antiquity,
1155 Digged from Colonna's garden t' other day,
That makes Rome very Greece for majesty.
I hapt in Rome then at the Pope's behest,
And with these very eyes beheld rebirth,
From its forgotten grave, of marble Awe.
1160 Thence I got word of greatness for the task
Of princely housing holding then my hand.
You'll see the Torse's bigness in that work.

But 't was before the hour of fate was ripe.
He wanted no cathedral for his house —
1165 Not Cosimo! 'T was so he put me down
When I before his dazzled eyes deployed,
In rhythmic pomp of prideful blazonry,
The plastical presentment of the wish
That trumpet to empire in his heart of hearts,
1170 Yet craftily o'erwrought and smothered deep
'Neath padded coverture of humbleness,
That thence no cry from vibrant throats outbreathe
To waken up the people's first alarm.

BRUNELLESCHI

As when ere some great rite deep silence broods
1175 O'er the awed rapture of a twilight throng,
And every heart halts breathless for a sound
To thrill the expectant emptiness; beyond,
Beyond the pulsate smother of sealed door
Beyond sealed door, dumb room beyond dumb room,
1180 The silken-trained processional prepares,
And lifts the lisping of the quire divine,
Itself its song's sole audience: so I knew,
Beyond the unbroke seals of Cosimo
His mind, and still within his outward front
1185 So modest—nay, so mean—the pæan proud
That murmurous prepared a future shout,
Ominous kin to clank. Intuitive
I, artist, saw (with eyes which on worn knees
Searcht inward, pricking ear for that the drum
1190 Trembled not yet with) what must be, one day,
The shame of our evolving history
Not yet in being, and the coilèd spring
Of his heart and of Florence's. That spring
I made the motive of the majesty
1195 I clothed his habitation stiff withal,
Like cloth-of-gold ashimmer, rich impearled—
Symbol of sovranty, the mask and show
Of inward quicks he dared not yet to face

NOON

Or venture forth upon; which he knew not,
1200 Perchance, stretcht treacherous as morning glass,
Tempting steeled feet o'er thinness. My device,
My rich imagined house interpretive,
Flasht mirror-wise his hidden longing's face
On his shockt consciousness.

1205 "No! No!" he cried,
"Not such thoughts in my inmost being live—
All innocent of rule am I at heart!
Or if there spring, deep down, a seed of lust
For princehood, still that shoot must screen its push
1210 To life, lest Florence ravish my safe place
Of treasure, and my stirps do deathward. No!
Enough, that what of power I have, I have
All unannounced—the substance, not the face.
The face hath force to quench young power's fount
1215 As Gorgon froze hope's life-blood. Palaces
Speak loud; I merely want a whispered tale
Of merchant modesty."

A whispered tale!

Ye gods! And 't was for me to breathe in stone,
1220 "This man is but a townsman like us all—
There is no harm in him—see but this mask—
Only a modest trader."

Artistry,

BRUNELLESCHI

The soul behind my house interpretive,
1225 Betrayed itself so!

Character, not lies,
Is my art! Inner springs of consciousness
And seedlings of futurity that grope
Beneath thick-heapèd strata of old Adam
1230 In crannied rocks of selfhood, unsuspect,
'Tis the prime task o' th' architect to voice
As of the portraitist. Who cares to show
But the dry husking of his subject's soul,
And surface scorings, is far kin of him
1235 Who makes but to interpret.

Centuries
Of senseless aping of the north—in forms
Our sunshine ne'er claspt hands with, and whose tongue
Our tongues took hardly—had seared up, the while
1240 Thro' the long dark the southland slept, men's sense
Of the organic framework of all art,
And most of mine, the builder's. Cosimo
Spake Florence truly when he askt for lies,
Asking for art for cover. But you know—
1245 None better, Donatello—very truth,
Naught else, truth integral and poignant 'tis
That lifts art out of earthiness on wings
That fan the empyrean. And 'twas truth,

NOON

Divined by intuitions all divine,
1250 That Cosimo'd have none of.

Bottom-wrought—

As only he who dares behold a soul
Face outward and to grapple home with it
Can be wrought to despal of the craven
1255 Who safe behind accrete soul-fences still,
Perforce of custom, will ensconce himself
And smile content with surfacing—I sneered,
“Not art then 'tis you want, but subtlety—
Which is a kinder word for lying!”

1260 He,
Whose wont you know was flabby white, like worms
You startle fatly lurking under stones,
Flamed fire-bright at such touching; but cold steel
From his eyes' scabbard flasht, and flesht me sharp,
1265 Home to the hilt. “Your subtleties,” he hissed,
“Be for your subtleness, that peeps behind
The decencies indecently. Have done!
True art gives cover; 'tis false art betrays,
False to the purposes behind the veil.
1270 All life is built by veiling.”

There it was—

The secret of his potence, the crass warp
Wherethro' slid swift the shuttle of his mind,

BRUNELLESCHI

Weaving the patterned fabric of deceit
1275 To cloak his crescence!

Mad with rage, deep stung
By th' spiteful venom of his touchiness,
I crasht my clenched fist thro' the frail thing
So many months of hotfoot toil had reared,
1280 And crusht its fragile framework into naught—
The apple of my eye, for from the deeps
And hidden places of my second sight
It had sprung forth, the childing of the void
Impregnate of my will in potency
1285 Prophetic!

See yon smugness there below—
Milder and harmlesser than aught the town
Can show else, for the front of family
Or pride or power! Oh, very meek and smooth
1290 It sits and sits sweet smiling by the way,
And hawks its heart to the road's beckoning,
Unnotably pretentious; notablest
In all the town for pretense, notablest
As coadjutor of the game he plays,
1295 Its shy, suave owner, to make good the hold
That even now grows subtler and more sure
On the concupiscence of Florence!

God!

NOON

At that self instant when my talons tore
1300 The vitals from my Titan, underneath
A scarlet hood alongside hid, approved,
The model that had won his heart, the whore
He chose to house him—Michelozzo's lie,
Bastardly spawn of kingly seed of mine
1305 He'd watcht put forth when oft and oft again
He came to greet me friendly. Oh, you know
How I despised to hoard my secret; how
I stood to publish my full power abroad
For the world's weal, in over-proud contempt,
1310 Mayhap, of selfish pride—proud pridelessness
That hath undone me, fool of proudest pride!

But silence, proud Filippo! Hold thy tongue,
Lest rage bewray thy inward ravennings!
Those be old ulcers cleansed by kinder years.
1315 In this keen upward of thin April air
From whence the boundless ranging of the eye
Sights large the checkered telltale of the town,
And, seeing whole, yet sees in sharp detail
The open riddles of its skyward face
1320 (For towns, like men, ope heart but to the blue),
Now, in aloofness of long-coolèd thought
Freshened with friendship for that subtle hand

BRUNELLESCHI

Which, while it worms to maw what I would not
It ere get hold on, knows to bright bright gold,
1325 And gladden ancient Florence with young zest—
I see us, Cosimo and me, two types
Of onwardness, which, meeting in the lists
Of life, encounter—doughty champions, both,
Of selfsame hosts of conquest; 'gainst the world
1330 When pitted, single for advance; yet, coped
In the blind *mêlée* of the jousting-field,
At odds most rashly. I can see his art—
The art that comfort gives—a subtle thing
Of silk-soft tread, whose suave amenity
1335 Sweetens and riches being, brothers man
And clothes his consciousness with textiles fine
That fleece his nest with velvet. His the task
To skirmish far afield and commandeer
All Capuan luxuries for the long campaign—
1340 With risk of Capuan looseness. Cosimo
Hath made our Florence sweeter on the tooth
And softer under bone; I thank him for 't,
And for his friendly hand, forgetting soon
My sooner trespass. But I know that art—
1345 Our art, which is a thing of mastery—
Strikes deeper than the surface, rounds a range
Vaster than scout-purveyors of earth-sweets

NOON

Ere dreamed of searching, and proves good its claim
To larger regions of the soul than they
1350 Can compass in their vastest views. I know
Great art full-panoplied for war, and armed
With the bright glaive of light. Not love she bears
But that sharp sword which leaps to the deep heart
Of things, and outs love's secrets; forges on
1355 Into the vast unknown and cleaves a way
Thro' grewsome forest and o'er desert wild
Unto the hold creation, whence spring
The founts of being, one with Him who wields
The wand supernal. As the Master saith,
1360 "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth:
I came not to send peace, but a sword,"
So enters the Eternal into man,
Whether He come as Christ into the world
To ransom heart-stuff from assault of sin,
1365 Or come as force creative, to redeem
The promise of man's conscience, to lay low
The beast of grossness, and to raise up heads
That slumber till His coming—to raise up
Heights that shall look upon His face and shine
1370 Bright beacons to the hindmost.

These be all

Divine, inexplicable mysteries.

BRUNELLESCHI

You know, my friends, we be but instruments,
No more, we artists; blades whose tempered steel
1375 Life sharpens to swift practice, grinding down
Their native roughness to such razor-edge
As slips 'twixt life and death, 'twixt false and true.
God! and when hearts are rubbed thus, who shall say
The anguish of that sharpening? None may guess
1380 Their midnights, their beseechings, their revolts,
Their up-in-arms against the law of life
That grips them fast to loathe and to delight
In one same act, of making and destroying,
Of striking to the bottom to lay ope
1385 The sores and grafts of life (oh, horrid tasks
Of swift red lopping!), to the very bone
Slashing the growth convention, to the rock
Clearing débris of ages, so to rear
A fairer fane of beauty which shall tower,
1390 A city on a hill, that men shall know
O'er stretcht-out plains of generations, fair
As moon-kissed alabaster 'gainst the night—
A pinnacled, spiring splendor's mystic web
Of lucent chiseling!
1395 O Christ, how fine
Are these, Thy instruments of making, ground
Betwixt the upper and the lower—blades

NOON

Thou sharpenest, or grains (I know not which)
Of corn Thou bruisest into snowy dust
1400 To feed the generations—fertilized
Thro' bruising's death to mystic fruit of life!
My figures melt like rivers in a sea
Of light ashimmer in a rich mirage
That lures us on across life's boundless sands
1405 To Edens endlessly removed.

No more!

Now to those hands that wait to know my hest,
This hour of mine atop flies on apace.

BRUNELLESCHI

PART III—EVENING

TIME: *Sunset and dusk of the same day.*

SCENE: *The slopes below San Miniato, overlooking Florence.*

PERSONS: *Brunelleschi and Donatello.*

Brunelleschi speaks.

THINE arm, Donato, up these cypress glooms.
1410 Tide thou me o'er this deep sward, blanchly sprayed
And fresh with breathing fragrance; up the swell
To the sheened harborage of sunset-spilth
Oozing from cloud-cliff ledges of the west
To yon bronze pond of even, cypress-walled.
1415 Fragile as fingers phantom-thin, those spires
Of dun grove-sanctuaries lean aloft
And answer the lush zephyrs' buoyancy,
More sensitive than seaweeds to the deep's
Inconstant instance. Beckon they to eve's
1420 Pale primrose leagues of lucence, "Hitherward,
In waters of submerging ecstasy
Transfused, pour down, baptize, anoint us, one
With everlasting, glorious farewells!"

BRUNELLESCHI

Or reads my heart its conscience into theirs,
1425 That thus I voice them? Sunset and Farewell—
They walk companionly the shadowy aisles
Of my heart's cloister, silent of today,
Reverberant alone of bygone things,
In memory. . . .

1430 In memory, O Gift—
O bounteous gift, not niggard as men say,
Calling thee Donatello—memory
Of thee and of thine ancient giving! This,
Thine arm that crutcheth me, upbears in sooth
1435 My heavy spirit more than earthly weight.
Thou so hast ever done; I thank thee. Words—
What be they when the heart is full? Wan shapes
That swoon unrecognizable beneath
The flood of feeling, not to be reclaimed!
1440 And words, to me, thou know'st, have ever been
But exercise of torture, tearing way
From sealèd treasure-chambers of my soul
In torment; for my natal tongue—and thine—
Is one of forms, of symbols of no sound,
1445 That discourse hold not with the gossip ear
But with the eye, and thro' the plastic sense,
Touch in imagination. Pardon thou
My want of wordy-wise conveyancing;

EVENING

My heart's estates are thine inheritance
1450 By right unwrit. Thou'st known to read my thought,
My deep's emotion, in the printless page
Of wall and bastion, colonnade and tower,
And (fullest witness of my soul's desire)
My Dome's immortal palimpsest of love.
1455 Corporate art thou in that perfectness.
Its resolute assurance, pausing yet
This side of self-sufficiency; its swift
Abandon, which a delicate restraint
Reins in from recklessness; its vital verve,
1460 Whose breezy freshness gentle manners make
Kindly demure—these are thy gifts to it,
In that thou gavest me thy love to keep,
And, keeping, I imbibed it till my soul
Knew not the metes betwixt its own and thine,
1465 Drowned in affection's flood-tide. I know not
How makers can mature in isolate
And self-sufficing ownness. Nay, methinks
Such beings be not as can mount alone,
Amid the threat and scuffle of the world,
1470 Up gateways of the day. Companionship—
In ends akin, in pace along the road,
In tongue, in taste—is needful to the task.
I, whom our Florentines count loneliest,

BRUNELLESCHI

How have I been befriended! Never else
1475 Had I been borne to take the onward wave
And win toward harbor—harbor never yet
Man might attain to, ere the falling night.

Night falls apace. More stoutly up these glooms
Speed ye, my cloddy footsteps, to the space
1480 Whence are these shadows washt, whence o'er the vale
Mine eyes may plane as on a level wing.
Once more—as God looks down upon His world,
The handiwork He loves so well His eye
Parts never from it—I must gaze upon
1485 My masterwork adown these heights removed.

Now glimmers west-washt silver forth the bronze
Of dwindling cypresses—the dais'd shrine
Of far San Miniato, regent hoar,
Unquestioned, on the headland of the hills
1490 Up-thronèd high, whom prostrate valleys yield
Sweeping obeisance unto. Pearly dews
Now drench and sanctify that saintly front
With kisses of wan even. Lo, the flush
Which blooms his ancience at the pure salute!

1495 How oft in days agoe have I toiled up

EVENING

These highlands in saint pilgrimage to learn
The lessons of yon ancient! Thence the lead
I followed—far, far off—when Cosimo
Gave me to build anew the rotting fane
1500 Of San Lorenzo. Santo Spirito
As well is of his blood, and proudest prince
Of that great strain. Recall, Donato, hours
We friended o'er these hills and dreamed the day
When Florence should awake and know us hers!
1505 E'en then, before I knew me architect,
I glimpsed the perfecting of motives yet
Inchoate or abortive in the frame
Of sire San Miniato. After-years—
When I at length had crossed my Rubicon,
1510 Campaigning Romeward—fixt those motives' fate,
When you and I ranged over the seven hills
Mid churches of the early faith; for then
I knew San Miniato for the van
Of the far-purposed army of true type,
1515 Outpost of sane tradition. Mindest thou
The vineyard-height of the hill Aventine,
How o'er the brink it beetles of the swirl
Of ochre Tiber? On its brow, afar
And lonely from now haunts of men—sole rest,
1520 Or well nigh, of the teeming hordes that erst

BRUNELLESCHI

Peopled its slopes with proletariat—
Upon the brow of Aventine is set
Rome's clearest witness of the morn devout
Whence rays our day of Christdom: humblemost
1525 Santa Sabina. There I felt my heart
Touched to its deepest sense of simpleness
And childly trust. By beauties unobscured
Which glorify the shrines of loftier saints,
That house of quietness makes room for prayer
1530 Spontaneous, uncompulsèd of all spur
Of splendor or of poignance figurate.
Its very bareness breeds a broader faith.
Its rudeness links one with the Manger-born,
Its pureness with His sacring. Sacrifice
1535 Is writ upon its gates, in freighted cross
First-fruit exemplar from the sculptor's tool
In that rash kind. ("Take thou a bit of wood
And fashion me that Agony!" recall'st,
O Donatello?) Me that grandeur took
1540 Of self sincerity, and on a day
I wrought thereafter.
Too much, thinkest thou,
I prate of bygones? too much base my mind
On olden wont? Thy hand hath found a means
1545 To work its way unhampered, tho' thine art

EVENING

Drew milk from ancient udders, as mine own.
Yet but bethink thee! Sculpture deals with man,
Life's great convention, ever help at hand
And scapeless even wouldst thou scape its prop;
1550 Limning, not less so. But we architects
Handle imagined forms, by architects
Created, our forerunners—timeless kin,
Voiceless yet partners of the compact. Ours
Convention with gone fellows, whose built words
1555 Gain usufruct of meaning in the mouths
Of thriftful generations. Therefore art
In my kind is antiquity re-youthed,
New-furbisht fresher for its anciency.
I reverence the past as thou, Donato,
1560 Worship'st fine human figure, as the type
Whence thou derivest freedom to essay
Outward in realms thine only; scrupulous
To guard essential likeness to the kind
On pain of losing truth in license.
1565 Ha!
Behold! Once from the shades enfranchised, bursts
A universal glamour of doomed day!
Tho' thou art fled, O Lucence, tarrieth
The spirit of thy splendor, nebulous
1570 Out airy vasts of scintillance. Unbound,

BRUNELLESCHI

The rich ambrosian tresses of the orb
Departed, riot-streaming, swathe the void
Abyss illimitable of the heavens—
Auroral aura of Divinity!

1575 On fiery front of Godhead Sinai gazed
Sole scatheless; us 'tis now vouchsafed to glimpse
In rapture Godhead's radiant aureole,
That whelms eve's desert welkin with flood-flame
Out-glorying Apollo! Ne'er was sight
1580 So dazzling with long-dalliant gorgeousness'
Loose-lapsing tendrils and out-shredded films
Of dissipate liquescent fire, as now
Zeniths Val d' Arno, sheer-o'erleaping!

Oh,

1585 How is Thy greatness magnified, O Lord,
By this adumbrance of Thy majesty!
The day hath left but trails impalpable
Of the supernal progress; yet the cheek
Blanches and pricks with chill of awed surmise,
1590 The heart leaps up and halts in ecstasy
At but this pale remembrance of day's loss,
As 't were faint fragrance of an hour forgot
Wafted adown the airy aisles of dreamland.

Lo, and the vale! Outspread beneath the cope

EVENING

1595 Of skiey conflagration, how is it
Beholden to that glory, counter-tinct
Responsive to candescent radiance
And steep in variant empery of hues
That clothe the footstool of the purple throne
1600 With throneful splendor! On the velvet breast
Of earth's unearthly beauty flames one gem,
Up-founting in distinction moltenly
And catching sky-fire on its sole-bright brow.
O Dome that art my skiey part and whole
1605 Of my sky-yearning, now hath fallen on thee
The sanctifying ray of Heaven and bred
Transcendence in thee—this my heart a clod
That hath brought forth a cloud of glory!

Friend,

1610 Dear friend, this fusion of the world with heaven
Melteth old hatred to a shamèd thing.
My Child hath found the glamour of the sky
And shines redeemèd; the eleventh hour
Hath overtaken my harsh-heartedness.
1615 It shall not be so. Take my testament:
My Child, that I have borne and given suck,
And brought most-way to manhood—yea, my Dome—
I do bequeath it to mine enemy,
Whom I have hated. He will cherish it.

BRUNELLESCHI

1620 I know him, and have hated him the more
For that I knew him all unhateable:
Weak once and human, merely — Michelozzo.
I cannot climb to Him who on the rock
Of weakness full-forgiven set His throne,
1625 Unless unfarshaled of that hating. . . .

Gone!

E'en as we wonder — gone! As memory
Evades reluctant, like a breathed-on flame,
And into darkness wavers and withdraws —
1630 As young men's visions fade to old men's dreams —
The day's last lingering splendor now dissolves
Into dim eve's phantasmal loveliness.

So hath my wick gone out. My day of toil,
Donato, it is done. Remaineth naught
1635 Of the long road of frustrate dreams.

Shall dawn

Yet e'er revolve and up the painted east
Shoot splendor? We have felt these eager years
The dawning of a loveliness. But night
1640 Draws close about us, and its touch is cold
Upon my brow. Mine eyes are dark. My hand
Bridles no longer to his wonted toil.
And yet this heart will not be daunted! Thou,

EVENING

Who hast the secret of the secret things
1645 Divined in the organic principle
Of character in beauty—thou, and I
Who have groped with thee up toward Beauty's shrine
And laid upon her altar all I am—
We may not doubt the passing of this dark.
1650 Too deep in the essential core of life
Is beauty planted to be rooted out
And cast upon the sateless fires of time.
If branch be lopt, yet shall new shoots put forth,
More manifold, more strengthened for the knife.
1655 So we have grown with lopping, well thou know'st—
Purged by adversity, and circumcised
In spirit by affliction. The heart needs
Some slashing for the perfect fruit.

These years

1660 That have lookt forward to a dawning sweet,
Upon my tongue they have been bitter. Oh,
I drained the cup of scorn in those old days
When laughter and detraction followed me
From fangful packs of snarlers, e'er and aye
1665 Thro' damnèd years of effort to my end—
My end that more was Florence's. That cup,
So long since drunken to the nauseous dregs,
Hath venomèd something at my inmost source

BRUNELLESCHI

And sent me tainted down the hill, attaint
1670 With pungence and acerbity where else
Had run but sweetness and a madcap rill
Of hurtless laughter. 'Tainted streams (what else?)
Should flow from that outrageous prisonment
Which gnarled my joints with agues, rheums, and blains,
1675 And shrouded visioned eyes with fetid damps,
Because, forsooth, assurance I had gained
At last to make my point against the throng;
Because, forsooth, no Builders' Guild I,
'Tho' I was building what their Builders' Guild
1680 Knew naught of nor could compass! Kindly milk
Flows not from acrid foster-dugs, as figs
Grow not on thistles. From my jailing gusht
The spring of poisoned arrows into rime
That seared thick skins as acid bites crude dross.
1685 Ah, God forgive my rancor! I am he
That is so crusht by wrong that lust bursts out
For vengeance on the wronger—and the years,
Upon my tongue they have been bitter.
Nay,
1690 Sweet wormwood, surely, since I've had thy faith
To balm the sore that healeth last of all.
And then, as core and substance of my life,
I've had a task immortal. None may say

EVENING

The life is bitter which hath held two bests
1695 God to Himself hath appanaged—to love
And to create; two bests that be but one,
For at the last to love is to create.
And to create? What is it but to love?
In irised indistinçtness all their lines
1700 Swim mystical about the void of night,
Merging in one thro' manifest diverse.
Yea, I have loved the love of loneliness,
Out-yearning worldwards in default of love
To pour my manhood unto, all my man
1705 Making for making. From my loins have leapt
A progeny of vital creatures—thoughts
That I have builded into loveliness,
Which, once brought forth, have life intrinsical.
Those children of the generative mind,
1710 We know not whither they may take their way,
Why live, where house, whom spouse, how procreate,
When shuffle off; scarce launcht, self-masters. Would
I might foreknow what time doth keep for them,
Those offspring mine! Will they be fruitful seed? . . .
1715 Apace the dusk advances into gloom.
While we have watcht, adown the darkening slopes
The day hath drainèd in a steady stream,

BRUNELLESCHI

Withdrawing stealthily thro' cypress isles
Uplift from forth its current. Now the flood
1720 Of tardy-truant laggard light hath dropt
And leveled, gathered in the serpentine
Pearl-silver pool of Arno. Only there
All radiant wanderers have rendezvous'd
In glassy splendor. Out into the west
1725 Light lies and languishes in liquid sleep.

O peachblow bloom of Florence! How thy heart
Is mirrored in that lambence, which flows on
Into unwot-of realms of the west's day,
Revolving evermore! Thy soul hath burst
1730 And burgeoned riotously on the brave
Meander-margents of this westward stream,
As 'twere the stem of time and thou the bloom
That glads its nakedness. Well they thee called
Who from the lavish garden of all tongues
1735 Sought out the richest treasures, bee-wise,
And culled the deathless honey of thy name.
Thy soul is one with loveliness, thy name
But one with that it nameth—gentle breath
That wafts the sweetness of all blossoming
1740 Aboon the dusty wayside.

Florentine!

EVENING

How sing the heart-strings to the kindling warmth
Of that flute-call's full music! Florentine!

'Tis thou and I, Donato, summoneth

- 1745 That blossom-soft, high clarion; and he
Whose name—akin to thine, the giving-one—
Is as a pearl of price, whose form is lost
In dissolution in the noble grape
Of "Florentine," so one leap o'er our lips
1750 That living name and Dante's! Thence 'tis ours
To be the fellows of immortal song,
And to breathe in song's vital spirit. He,
Who wove the garden-sweetness of all love
Into one awesome triune universe
1755 Of everlasting being, hath laid hand
Upon our brows who spring from selfsame soil,
And breathed into our mere mortality
A breath immortal. Ours to live and die
More greatly for his greatness, and more sweet
1760 For that his fragrance hath embosomed sense
In spirit largeness.

O thou Florentine!

Essential, adjunct, and epitome—

Stem, branch, and blossom—of our consciousness!

- 1765 Behold I now thy form upon the marge
Of glamorous Arno, dreaming in the gloam?

BRUNELLESCHI

Or is it she whom I have loved and served—
She whom I have espoused—whom in my breast
I wear, the cresting blossom of the world,
1770 Time's fragrant childling, Florence? Be it thou
Or she—thou, sweetest voice of deathlessness,
Or she, whom thy sweet voice hath deathless made—
One only soul I witness, evermore
Inseparate. Snatch thou me up to thee,
1775 Lift thou my spirit till't be one with thine
And thou become the essence of my soul
As of our city! Nay, I am but one
With thee; I lipt thy measures with her milk
Who bare me, and my self is saturate
1780 With thy flood-spirit. In my work of works—
Yonder up-standing quickened thing of clay—
There throbs the life-blood of thy mightiness
Somehow thro' me anew made manifest,
From thee derivative, from thee who sprang
1785 From the essential pregnancy Florence is
Of power and sweetness. Thine and hers it is,
That greatness I have fathered, now in night
Still gleaming—luminous, of all the vale,
Alone. From out the shrouded west some ray
1790 Inscrutably still penetrates the dark
And touches to long-lingering rose the Dome,

EVENING

Informing, as a lamp its glow, that globe
With warmth and lambency.

Oh, may it be

- 1795 A shining for the age to come, the flame
Of a vast-regioned cresset, beaconing
The minds that are my fellows yet-to-be
Up darksome trails of travail to the height
Where shrines, approachable, the Loveliness
1800 Eternal. May my art contribute to,
And bring down nearer to men's bungling hands,
The art of the divine Artificer
Wherein are all things as the light of day,
Tho' darkly now we see as in a glass.
1805 In sudden vision I behold the hour
When art shall speak untrammelled and its words
Shall arrow straight unto their goal, nor mist
Of indirection but obscure the sense
That lies behind their music. May my light,
1810 Tho' be't but darkness, kindle on and on
Into the night and usher in a morn
When architecture shall be one with truth,
Truth one with power, and power with constancy!

- Yet I bethink me in my heart of hearts
1815 That truth is one with trial. I have set

BRUNELLESCHI

My hand unto a task whereof not all
I might fulfil and live, for so not man
Were I, but He who made man in His image—
Endowed with heavenward power to look above
1820 But ever impotent to reach the height.
For the allotted three score years and ten—
Or such of them as answered—I've essayed
To climb the summit of the centuries
And orb their life in skiey stone! And now
1825 From off my height unfinisht, unattained,
I step into the starry ambience
And mystery of evening skies. . . .

The Dome!

Behold! While we are musing, from the east
1830 Hath swum the glamour of the lesser light
And rimed its lamp with silver. I will take
This radiance as an augury. Farewell!
Let us go down, Donato, while the moon
Plays Dian to Endymion, my Dome,
1835 Kissing his sleep to dreams of loveliness
That shall fulfil all longing!

Gift, thine arm. . . .

NOTES

The full name of Brunelleschi (1377-1446) was Filippo di Ser Brunellesco Lapi. Brunelleschi, the name by which he is generally known, was the family name of his paternal grandmother.

LINE 4

Andrea di Lazzaro de' Cavalcanti (1412-1462), called, from his birthplace, Buggiano. He was a sculptor, a pupil of Donatello, and a close friend and protégé of Brunelleschi, who adopted him as a son.

LINE 24

'Tis a beauty such, methinks,
As none but he who made can utterly
Delight in!

This is a reference to the following lines of Dante:

La bellezza ch' io vidi, si trasmoda
Non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo
Che solo il Suo Fattor tutta la goda.

PARADISO: Canto XXX, lines 19-21.

Vasari tells us that Brunelleschi was a profound admirer of Dante, whose lines were ever on his lips. Several paraphrases are mentioned hereafter in these notes; but it is unnecessary, and indeed impossible, to identify all of the oblique allusions with which the text is sown. Brunelleschi gives full credit in his own words to the Florentine for the debt he, and all men, owe him. (See line 1762 *et seq.*)

NOTES

LINE 26

Arnolfo di Cambio, or di Lapo, (1232-1301) was the original architect of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, which was founded in 1294. Arnolfo's father's name was Lapo, while Lapi was the family name of Brunelleschi, whose father was Ser Brunellesco di Lippo Lapi. This suggests a possible family relationship, all the more probable as Vasari tells us that the above Ser Brunellesco's grandfather was called Cambio. Lapi was, however, one of the most common of all Florentine names.

LINE 55

There hath art

Touched the high term of beauty.

Brunelleschi has in mind the following lines of Dante:

Ma or convien che il mio seguir desista

Più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,

Come all' ultimo suo ciascuno artista.

PARADISO: Canto XXX, lines 31-33.

LINE 66

Timid that profile as it budded first

Arnolfo's original plan, which was modified after his death by his successors, included an octagonal dome of masonry, but much lower in profile than as executed later by Brunelleschi; and, furthermore, without the high drum or wall which lifts the dome proper some twenty-five feet above the top of the nave walls. The initial idea of the dome, therefore, we owe to Arnolfo; its freedom, majesty, and beauty, as well as the skill of its execution, to Brunelleschi.

LINE 70

Those close *maestri*,

The general conduct of the construction of the cathedral was in the hands of the *maestri* (masters) of the *Opera del Duomo* (Board of Works of the Cathedral).

NOTES

LINE 162

Unfinisht yet and webbed with scantling gold

The main structure of the dome proper had been completed and the cathedral consecrated in 1436, ten years before Brunelleschi speaks; the lantern, of white marble, was begun seven years later, only three years before the architect's death, in 1446, and not finished till 1462, under Michelozzo.

LINE 189

'Tis thou I would have make my monument;

The most interesting and valuable work of Andrea's which has come down to us is the circular wall-tablet in relief, to Brunelleschi's memory—admirable in execution, and most convincing as a portrait—which is placed high on the south wall of the cathedral just inside the southwest entrance.

LINE 218

Thou know'st my model for Lorenzo's doors;

Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), the sculptor. The baptistry doors which were the subject of the competition in 1401 are those on the south side, corresponding in general character with the north doors already completed in 1336 by Andrea Pisano. On completion, after more than twenty years of labor, Ghiberti's doors were considered so fine that he was commissioned to execute the east doors as well; and it was these, even finer than the south doors, which Michelangelo declared worthy to be the gates of Paradise. These occupied Ghiberti more than a quarter of a century, and were his most important work.

LINE 243

Giotto di Bondone (1276-1337), like Arnolfo and Brunelleschi, died before the completion of his great architectural

NOTES

work. The tower, which he had begun in 1334, was completed in 1387. Yet "completed" is hardly the word to use, for Giotto's plan contemplated a high spire above the present cornice, which has never been executed, though the preparations for it are to be seen in their unfinished state under the supposedly temporary roof of the tower.

LINE 325

Our two — Lorenzo's and my own — stood out

These two models in bronze, for a panel illustrating the Sacrifice of Isaac, are now hung side by side in the Bargello. There are considerable differences in merit as to composition, which are in Ghiberti's favor; but the most striking superiority of his bronze is in its spiritual quality. His Abraham is loth to strike, while Brunelleschi's goes vigorously to work, "hot to the deed, e'en odious" (see line 338).

LINE 365

Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, 1386-1466), the great sculptor, was Brunelleschi's stanchest friend till death.

LINE 368

Masaccio (Tommaso di Ser Giovanni Guidi da Castel San Giovanni, 1401-1428), who died at the early age of twenty-seven, had already worked a revolution in painting. His frescoes in the Brancacci chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine are perhaps the finest of his works that remain to us. These and others were the models from which Michelangelo and Raphael, and in fact most of the later painters of the Renaissance, studied and formed their style.

LINE 436

In desert purlieus of the shrunken town

At the end of the middle ages Rome had shrunk to a small

NOTES

town. For three-quarters of a century before Brunelleschi's time, the city was not even the papal capital, the popes having established their court at Avignon, whence they returned to Rome the year of Brunelleschi's birth, 1377. The city then went through a period of more than two score years of schism and anarchy hardly less, perhaps more, disastrous than absolute desertion. The latter half of this period was the time of Brunelleschi's life there.

LINE 448

How 't was I lived,

Nothing is known, save in the most general way, of Brunelleschi's life in Rome; but in visiting the city it is a most interesting and stimulating experience to center one's mind, for a time, on what still exists there that was a part of Brunelleschi's own knowledge. It is astonishing how fully and clearly the character of the town, as he must have known it, may still be made to emerge.

LINE 469

Round me cattle browsed

The Forum, in mediæval and Renaissance times, was quite outside the inhabited part of the town, in the fields, and was known as "the cow-pasture" (*campo vaccino*).

LINE 476

giants, half their height

Awful up-turreting,

An allusion to Dante's lines:

Però che, come in su la cerchia tonda

Montereggion di torri si corona,

Così la proda che il pozzo circonda,

Torreggiavan di mezza la persona

Gli orribili giganti, cui minaccia

Giove del cielo ancora, quando tuona.

INFERNO: Canto XXXI, lines 40-45.

NOTES

LINE 505

The Amphitheater's o'erwhelming sweep

The Amphitheater was far more complete in Brunelleschi's time than now. It was used all through the Renaissance as a quarry whence the materials were obtained for building the palaces which sprang up soon after the return of the papal court.

LINE 539

the ends of earth

Together all were gathered up within
One fascicle of governance,

See Dante's lines:

Poi, presso al tempo che tutto il ciel volle
Ridur lo mondo a suo modo sereno,
Cesare, per voler di Roma, il tolle.

PARADISO: Canto VI, lines 55-57.

LINE 546

pagan priests

Did sanctify that temple to gods seven

The Pantheon was dedicated originally to Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, Apollo, Diana, Venus and Mars.

LINE 709

the great refusal

See Dante's lines:

Vidi e conobbi l'ombra di colui
Che fece per viltate il gran rifiuto.

INFERNO: Canto III, lines 59-60.

LINE 758

Reversing in perspective, vanisht down

Brunelleschi did much to perfect, if he did not actually invent, a method of perspective drawing, which until his time had been little used. In particular he taught his method to Masaccio, who profited greatly by it.

NOTES

LINE 949

I had a crew of masons at the Dome
Gathered in secret

Vasari says these masons were not Florentines, but Lombards.

LINE 978

The basket must be full,

Donatello had the amiable habit of keeping his money in an open basket which hung in his workroom, and any friend in need might help himself.

LINE 994

A lily whose frail petals turn aback

The lily figured on the coat of arms of Florence, whence the cathedral took its name of Santa Maria del Fiore (of the flower).

LINE 1006

The lady Gaddi's topknot?

This lady of the Gaddi family was only one of many who made Brunelleschi's life miserable by their pertinacious and conceited advocacy of designs by themselves, to replace the exquisite conception of the architect.

LINE 1047

My tiny cell in Santa Croce's garth

The Capella, or Chapel, of the Pazzi family, erected by Brunelleschi about 1430. The entrance is from the cloister.

LINE 1061

Well-meaning Frank

Francesco della Luna, one of Brunelleschi's pupils and assistants, to whom several of his designs were entrusted for execution. Among these was the Spedale degli Innocenti,

NOTES

which is not infrequently called the first work of Renaissance architecture, having been begun about 1419. Francesco had it in charge after 1427, and made certain changes in the design during the course of construction which enraged Brunelleschi when he perceived them, though friendly relations continued.

LINE 1086

The church of Santo Spirito, usually regarded as Brunelleschi's masterpiece, was begun in 1436, but not finished until 1482, thirty-six years after the architect's death, the work having been carried on under the direction of several successive superintendents.

LINE 1089

The church of San Lorenzo, the reconstruction of which under Brunelleschi was begun in 1425, still lacked its dome at Brunelleschi's death.

LINE 1098

Rankles that smooth-faced house of Cosimo,

Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) had a model prepared for his house by Brunelleschi, but rejected it on account of its size and splendor, preferring the more modest design of Michelozzo, though it is said he afterward regretted his choice.

LINE 1103

Michelozzo (Bartolommeo di Gherardo di Michelozzo Michelozzi, 1396-1472), second only to Brunelleschi in architecture among the latter's contemporaries. Michelozzo was associated as architect with Donatello in many undertakings.

LINE 1133

Luca Pitti wished to surpass his powerful rival, Cosimo de' Medici, in the splendor of his palace, with which desire Brunelleschi worked in full sympathy. Before completing his

NOTES

house, however, Pitti lost his wealth and power; and the palace eventually became the property and official residence of the Medici family, thus justifying our architect's intuitions.

LINE 1153

the Torse,

Compact of vigorous antiquity,
Digged from Colonna's garden t'other day,

The fragment of antique Greek sculpture, now known as the Torso of the Vatican, was unearthed from the Colonna gardens in Rome not long before 1440. About this period Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) requested Cosimo de' Medici to send an architect to him at Rome. Cosimo sent Brunelleschi, saying that such was his greatness that "he would undertake to move the world." The Pope was astonished at Brunelleschi's insignificant appearance. "So you can move the world?" "Verily, an you but furnish me a fulcrum for my lever!"

LINE 1261

Whose wont you know was flabby white, like worms

The most convincing portrait of Cosimo, in which the pale, unwholesome look is emphasized, is part of Benozzo Gozzoli's mural paintings in the private chapel of the Medici (now the Riccardi) Palace.

LINE 1482

as God looks down upon His world,

The handiwork He loves so well His eye
Parts never from it—

The reference is to the following passage from Dante:

E lì comincia a vagheggiar nell' arte
Di quel Maestro che dentro a sè l' ama
Tanto, che mai da lei l' occhio non parte.

PARADISO: Canto X, lines 10-12.

NOTES

LINE 1488

The church of San Miniato al Monte, built in the eleventh century, is one of the finest examples of the Romanesque, or, one might say, early Christian, basilica type north of Rome.

LINE 1498

when Cosimo

Gave me to build anew the rotting fane
Of San Lorenzo.

Strictly speaking, it was Giovanni de' Medici, Cosimo's father, who had originally set Brunelleschi to work at San Lorenzo, to rebuild the sacristy. On the death of Giovanni, however, in 1429, Cosimo (in conjunction with several other donors) continued and extended the employment to include the entire reconstruction of the church. Both San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito are strongly reminiscent of the basilica type of church.

LINE 1525

The church of Santa Sabina was built about 425, and is, of all the early Christian basilicas, the least changed from its original character. Its ancient doors still retain their primitive carvings, among which is what is reputed to be the oldest extant crucifixion.

LINE 1537

"Take thou a bit of wood

And fashion me that Agony!"

When Donatello was a boy he carved a crucifix of wood which now hangs in Santa Croce. Brunelleschi, on seeing it, exclaimed that he had put a clown on the cross. Deeply chagrined, Donatello cried, "Take wood and carve one for yourself, then!" Brunelleschi accepted the challenge, and presently asked Donatello in to see his crucifix, having meanwhile kept his work a secret. Donatello was completely overcome with

NOTES

the beauty of his friend's achievement, which is now in San Lorenzo.

LINE 1685

I am he

That is so crusht by wrong that lust bursts out
For vengeance on the wronger —

See Dante's lines :

Ed è chi per ingiuria par ch' adonti
Sì, che si fa della vendetta ghiotto;
E tal convien che il male altrui impronti.

PURGATORIO: Canto XVII, lines 121-123.

LINE 1690

Sweet wormwood,

See Dante's words :

A ber lo dolce assenzio de' martiri

PURGATORIO: Canto XXIII, line 86.

LINE 1691

To balm the sore that healeth last of all.

See Dante's lines :

E questo modo credo che lor basti
Per tutto il tempo che il foco gli abbrucia:
Con tal cura convien, con cotai pasti
Che la piaga dassezzo si ricucia.

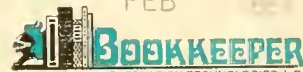
PURGATORIO: Canto XXV, lines 136-139.

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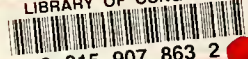
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